

SKELTON, CHARLES

71.2004 085 0347

CONTEMPORARIES



Abraham Lincoln's Contemporaries

Charles Skelton

Excerpts from newspapers and other
sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

SLAVERY AGITATION.

SPEECH OF HON. CHAS. SKELTON,
OF NEW JERSEY,
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
February 14, 1854,
*Against the repeal of the Missouri Com-
promise.*

The House being in the Committee of the Whole on the state of the Union—

Mr. SKELTON said:

Mr. CHAIRMAN: The subject which I propose to discuss on this occasion is one I approach with extreme regret. The subject recently introduced into this House, and on which we shall be compelled to act, involves questions of so much importance that I cannot, consistently with my sense of duty to my constituents and my country, refrain from giving my opinions to this committee, and to the country.

I desire, above all things, that the various States of our great Confederacy should dwell together in peace and harmony. We of New Jersey require peace; we demand peace; we desire to foment no sectional feelings, to excite no sectional hostilities—in a word, to do nothing that shall in any way disturb the harmony and prosperity of our common country. But, sir, we are compelled to act on a subject which does excite the public mind—a subject involving, in my opinion, the most momentous consequences to this country. I approach its consideration with those feelings of awe which every honorable man should have who is sensible of approaching a subject of importance and magnitude, involving the great interests of our common country.

I believe that I correctly represent the sentiments of the people whose representative I am upon this floor, when I say that they are devoted—passionately, irrevocably devoted—to the Union of these States. Entertaining these feelings, we extremely regret that anything should have been introduced into this body which may in the least disturb the harmony and friendship of the American States.

I regretted the more the introduction of this subject, because I believed that its introduction was entirely unnecessary and uncalled for. Our country, after the passage of the compromise act of 1850, after the election of General Pierce to the presidential chair of the United States, was reposing in entire quiet, peace, and harmony. I would not have contemplated for a moment, when I took my seat at the commencement of this session, that this subject of slavery, or any other calculated to disturb the harmony of our Confederacy, would be presented here.

The reasons which impelled honorable gentlemen to pursue the course which they have pursued it is not my province to inquire into. It is not my province to comment upon their motives; nor do I intend to comment upon the motives of any gentleman who is honored with a seat in this Hall, whatever course he may pursue. While I concede to every man a right to act according to the dictates of his own conscience, with a due sense of his responsibility to his country and to his God, I claim for myself the same high privilege; and I approach this subject with a deep consciousness of duty and responsibility.

It is hardly necessary that I should allude to the course of the city papers here—papers patronized by this Government—to their course of denunciation against individuals who are by a sense of duty compelled to act in opposition to this measure. I regret that these papers should have indulged in invective, in such terms as these: “abolitionists,” “factionists,” “sectionists,” “unprincipled,” “without conscience.” These are the terms, sir, which I have seen in these papers, sustained by Government patronage. Have we, Mr. Chairman—and I appeal to the members of this committee—have we really papers here—patronized by the Government—for the purpose of manufacturing public sentiment for this country, and of attempting to overawe the members who have a seat in this House?

Several MEMBERS. “Good!” “Good!”

Mr. SKELTON. When I first took my seat on this floor, the very first caucus that was held within these Halls, and very soon after the organization of the House, a series of resolutions were

presented here, asserting that the compromise measures were a finality. We, sir, were drilled up to think—to hope—that these measures should be a finality; that they were a sacred compact between the North and South; and that, as a sacred compact, and agreement, and contract, we were bound, in good faith, to carry them out.

We all recollect these things; and now we are called upon to repeal these contracts. I am not one of those who believe these compromise measures to possess all the binding force of the Constitution; but I do believe that the peace, harmony, and good faith of this country are at stake in the measure now to be acted upon. What were these compromises? Let us look at them. What was the compromise of 1820?—a compromise entered into when the State of Missouri was admitted into the Union as a State. How did the matter stand then? The North refused to admit Missouri, as a slave State, into the Union. Why? Because they saw that slavery was progressing over the territory purchased from France in 1803, and that the whole territory was like to be absorbed as slave territory. The North saw this, and feeling that they had equal rights with the people of the South to this territory, they came up here and refused to allow slavery to spread over the whole of that territory. Discussion ensued here during two sessions of Congress, and, eventually, an agreement was entered into, between the North and the South, to the effect that if the North would admit Missouri to come into the Union as a slave State, hereafter—to use the language of the act—hereafter all that territory lying north of 36° 30' north latitude, should forever be devoted to freedom, and that slavery should never be carried there.

Now, sir, the South obtained, in that agreement, their object and point, and Missouri was admitted as a slave State. How stands the matter now? Gentlemen tell us that this is not a proposition from the South. I admit that, sir; I admit that the South has not demanded it. I admit that the South was reposing in quiet, as well as the North, and that this proposition comes from a northern man, representing a State whose territory is now free, by virtue of an act similar to that of 1820. I allude to the act of 1787.

Now, I am one of those old-fashioned kind of men who believe that when a contract is made and entered into by men, they should stand by it, even though they had the worst of the bargain. I am willing to stand by contracts when fairly made; willing to stand by the compromises of the Constitution, and compromises entered into by honorable members upon this floor. They are contracts, and I cannot see how we can honorably abrogate them.

But our friends from the South say that we at the North have proffered this thing to them. “You tender the abrogation of the contract, and would it be dishonorable for us to receive that tender?” Well, sir, I admit the validity of the argument, provided the North did tender it. But has the North tendered this surrender of the compromise act of 1820? Allow me to make a suggestion, in order to test this question. Suppose the honorable gentlemen from the South would leave the question to the Representatives from the North to settle. If the North voluntarily, and of their own accord, unaided by the votes of the gentlemen from the South, should abrogate and annul this compact, the transaction would be perfectly fair. But as long as the North claims that this contract shall be carried out, I cannot see how honorable members from the South can come in and cast their votes with the minority of the northern Representatives in favor of the abrogation of the contract.

If this contract be thus broken, what confidence can we have in each other in the future? No more compromises can ever be made. No more concessions on either side—conciliation and harmony are at an end.

Suppose that slavery spreads into Nebraska—and I believe it will—and application is made to admit her as a slave State, will the free States quietly consent to it? Texas may be formed into four slave States. If Nebraska is admitted as a slave State, and the institution threatens to spread over territory now free by contract, will the Texas slave States be admitted without a struggle? In a word, will not the repeal of the Missouri compromise act reopen the whole slavery question, and give rise to contentions of the most fearful kind? Let statesmen pause before such a step is taken. The hopes and prospects of the future of the greatest nation the world has ever

seen, and the hopes of the friends of liberty throughout the world, may be involved in our action on this question.

I must pass rapidly over the points of which I propose to take a view upon this occasion, with merely hinting at the strong points and arguments which have been presented in favor of this measure. A full elimination of the arguments cannot be entered into during the hour which is allowed me for this discussion.

The pretext set up for the abrogation of this contract is, that the compromise of 1820 and that of 1850 are incompatible. Is it so? I think that

the discussion already had upon this subject has established the point that there is no incompatibility between them. What was the compromise of 1820? It related to the territory purchased from France, known as the territory of Louisiana—to that territory, and that territory alone. It applied to that, and nothing else. What were the compromises of 1850? They were the admission of California as a State, the admission of Utah as a Territory, the admission of New Mexico as a Territory, the running of a line between Texas and New Mexico, the abolition of the slave traffic in the District of Columbia, and the enactment of the fugitive slave law. These constituted the compromise measures of 1850; and in what particular, can any man tell me, are these measures incompatible with the compromise of 1820?

These measures applied to certain territory which I have named. The compromise of 1820 applied to certain territory acquired from France. Is it necessary, in order to be consistent, when we have admitted one Territory without slavery, that we should admit all the rest upon the same terms? Is that the position assumed by the gentleman, that because we admitted New Mexico and Utah without slavery, we are compelled to admit all other Territories upon the same terms? Examine this idea for a moment. Upon the same principle we might say, that because we admitted Texas with slavery, with territory sufficient for four States, that it will become necessary to admit all with slavery. I say, then, that there is no incompatibility between these measures.

The principle embraced in these measures is the earliest principle established in the legislation of the Congress of the United States. What was the principle of the act of 1787? It was, that slavery and free labor being incompatible, and when united were calculated to produce disorder and confusion, that a portion of territory should be set apart for a common inheritance where free laborers could go and cultivate the land without the accompaniment of degradation which ever follows the freeman laboring side by side with the slave. I say that this was the principle which our forefathers acted upon—a principle correct in theory, and highly beneficial in practice.

The South has got a part of the country which is calculated to make slavery profitable. She has received her share of every portion of territory set apart. We reserved to the North another portion, which was set apart for freedom. Is there any thing incompatible in these arrangements? This territory is a common inheritance, as honorable gentlemen from the South say. They have equal rights with us, and we claim equal rights with them. Let me, by way of illustration of this principle, give you an example: A man, dying, leaves a farm, as an equal inheritance to two sons. One of them insists upon having the whole farm worked according to his method; the other insists upon having it worked according to his notions. Neither of them can agree. What principle will be suggested to every reasonable man in such a condition? Why simply this: Let the farm be divided; and let one man who has one method of working his farm, and who insists upon that method, have his share; and let the other man, who has a different method of working his, and who also insists upon his own method, have his share, and let them both work side by side in peace and harmony.

Mr. KEITT, (interrupting.) May I ask the gentleman a question?

Mr. SKELTON yielded the floor.

Mr. KEITT. The gentleman speaks of the incompatibility of labor, and of a division of territory in consequence. Now, I would inquire of the gentleman whether he would have voted for a specific provision extending the Missouri compromise line to the Pacific?

Mr. SKELTON, (resuming.) That is a subject upon which I have not reflected to any considerable extent, and one upon which I am not at this time prepared to give a decisive answer. If it were presented to me in this House for my action, I should, as fairly as possible, make up my mind as to the justice or the injustice of such a measure,

and my vote would depend entirely upon my convictions of right. Under no circumstances have I any disposition to trample upon the rights of the people of the South; nor have I any disposition to allow the rights of the people of the North to be trampled upon. It is upon the great principle of right and justice that I would place all these great questions affecting the common interests of our country.

But gentlemen say there is a principle involved in the compromise of 1850, and that they want to establish one which shall hereafter govern the action of this House—that they want to establish a principle which shall hereafter and forever govern the action of the Congress of the United States. Sir, what is the proposition here presented? Establish a principle! Can we supersede acts of legislation by a principle? Can we abrogate contracts, whether right or wrong, by a principle? Will honorable members of this House attempt such a proposition? Are not the acts of the Congress of the United States, when constitutionally enacted, binding upon the people of this country? And can they rise, in the face of such acts, and say they have a principle which will abolish them? Why, sir, let honorable gentlemen look where they are going, when they talk about making a principle supersede contracts and acts of legislation. Where would such a proposition lead us? If there be any one principle more fully established than another, it is that every man has the right to himself, and a right to the possession of his own labor.

But, do you want to establish principles to supersede the constitutional legislation of the country? Again, I say, let us look where we are going. This very proposition would lead to the rankest abolitionism. At least that is my opinion. We are existing under a social compact; governed by laws, and by a Constitution deliberately established by the American people; and we are bound to observe the provisions of our Constitution and laws in all particulars.

There is a term which has been used in the discussion of this question, in the public prints throughout the country, to which I must give a passing notice. I have seen it in the public prints, and I have heard it upon this floor, that the Democratic party must crush out Free-Soilism and Abolitionism. I do not know where the term was first coined. A gentleman near me says that the Attorney General is the author of the term, but at all events, it is very expressive. "Crush out!" Crush out what? Crush out the love of liberty in the human heart. Is it our business to crush out the sentiments of the American people by the legislation of this Congress? If it is, I would like to know it. Is it the business of political parties to crush out the love of liberty which burns in the human heart as long as life lasts? Why, tyrants in every age of the world have been trying to crush out that spirit ever since Cain murdered his brother. Thrones and empires have been overturned, the earth has been deluged in blood, and yet that spirit still burns, and will ever burn. We have an example of it at this very time. The Emperor of Russia is about engaging in this crusade to crush out liberty in Western Europe. He has already planted his icy foot upon the fields of Hungary; he has already crushed down the patriots and republicans that rose there. But, sir,

"Truth crushed to earth shall rise again,
The eternal years of God are hers;
But error, wounded, writhes in pain,
And dies amid her worshippers."

This measure, Mr. Chairman, proposes to change the past policy of our Government. The only question which I shall take into consideration is whether or not the policy established in 1787, by our forefathers, the year in which the Constitution was established, was wrong. I am not bound to ancient custom and ancient usage. I believe in the progressive spirit of the age. I believe that we should accommodate ourselves to the condition in which we find ourselves existing. Whatever is right we should embrace; whatever is wrong we should discard. Let us look, then, for a moment at the policy established by our forefathers.

The introduction of the African race into this country has always been looked upon as one of the greatest curses with which our country has been afflicted. Hence it was the policy of this Government, when the Constitution was established, to prohibit the introduction of Africans into this country after the year 1808. This was the policy of the framers of the Constitution. They acted upon their conviction—a conviction which I entertain—that the introduction of the African race on this continent was a great evil inflicted on the Republic. Hence it was contemplated that, in the course of time, their importation should cease, and

it was so enacted in the Constitution of the United States. In the same year that the Constitution was adopted—in 1787—an act was passed by the Congress of the United States prohibiting slavery from all that territory northwest of the Ohio river. Now, I should like to know if that policy was wrong? I should like to know if any gentleman will get up on this floor and say that that act has been any injury to the prosperity of the country?

I ask whether the act of 1787 has been productive of good or bad results as to the prosperity of our country? I leave that question to be decided by the honorable Representatives of the five States composing that territory over which the restrictions of that act operated.

Mr. PHILLIPS, of Alabama. I rise to a question of order. I understand that the homestead bill was made the special order for this day, and until disposed of. Now, I submit whether it be in order for the gentleman from New Jersey to consume time which has thus been specifically appropriated in the discussion of other measures than the one which was assigned for consideration?

The CHAIRMAN. The Chair will state that that point of order has been repeatedly raised.

Mr. PHILLIPS. I know that the general point has been raised that when we are in the Committee of the Whole on the state of the Union, speeches may be made on any subject; but the specific question I make is this: When the House suspends all other business, and makes a specific measure the special order for consideration until disposed of, whether that does not alter the general practice?

The CHAIRMAN. If this were a new question, raised for the first time, the Chair would sustain the gentleman's point of order. He has, however, seen it repeatedly overruled in this body, and decides, in accordance with what has been the uniform practice, that the gentleman from New Jersey can proceed in his remarks.

[Cries of "Go on, Mr. SKELTON!"]

Mr. SKELTON. When interrupted, I was about stating that it was the general conviction that the introduction of the African race to this continent was an evil, and an evil much to be deplored. That position being admitted, the question may be started whether it is wise to spread this race all over the continent, and, in the language of writers of the present day, Africanize America. We have heard a great deal said about the Africanization of Cuba, of the abolition of slavery there by the British and Spanish Governments; and many gentlemen feel very sensitive on this point. If it be objectionable to Africanize Cuba, how much more objectionable would it be to Africanize America.

There is one fact in connection with this subject which I cannot pass by. I find that the slave portion of the African race multiply much faster than the free portion. The increase of slaves in the United States for the last sixty years has been 2,506,193, and of the free blacks 369,195. In addition to this, I find that, in 1850, 1,000 blacks escaped from slavery, and 1,000 were manumitted.

The position on which I rest my support of the past policy of our Government, and my conviction of the impropriety of surrendering that policy, is that free and slave labor are incompatible. This whole controversy, which has shook the Union, originated from the fact that the free laborers of the North, as the free laborers throughout the country, are making the most gigantic efforts to improve their social condition, and to give a character and influence to labor. They find, sir, that, wherever they are placed side by side with the African slaves, they share in part the degradation of the slaves who toil with them. Hence they object to be compelled to enter into competition with slavery.

Now, sir, the question presented to this House—to the Congress of the United States—is, shall we compel the union of these discordant elements? Shall the United States Government, hereafter, compel the free laborer of the North to enter into competition with the slavery of the South? I say, shall we compel it? I have no fear of the result of that contact—of the final action, and of the final result. But I would regret to see the contest, because it would engender a great deal of ill-feeling, and disturb the harmony of the people. If the battle must be fought, however—if the free laborers of the North must meet the slaves of the South face to face, and if one or the other must triumph, the result of the contest cannot be doubtful. Freedom and the free laborer, sir, will, in the end, triumph; and "the institution" will be "crushed out" and silenced forever. The contest may be bloody—may be fearful—may lead to confusion and disaster in the American nation, such

as will retard its progress and impair its prosperity for ages. For the sake of humanity, for the sake of the rights of law, for the sake of the free laborers of the North, for the sake of the slaves of the South, and those who own them as their property, I deprecate the commingling of these elements.

Sir, these laboring masses have produced all the wealth that exists—have changed the face of this whole continent—have felled the darkening forests that shaded the savage beasts, and the more savage men—have cultivated the soil and made the desert to bloom as a garden—have reared populous and prospering cities—have reared our school-houses and churches—have built our ships, and freighted them with the products of the soil and the labor of their hands, and have navigated them through every ocean and sea to the remotest corners of the globe. This class has ever been oppressed by the strong arm of military power, and the influence of concentrated wealth—have been deprived of the products of their labor, and, in many countries, of their personal liberty, and sold and bought with the soil. Even in ours, the most favored of all lands, they do not occupy their true and just position in the political and social scale. The struggle of these mighty multitudes is to rise in the social and political scale of society. Justice and humanity demands that this struggle should not be obstructed. That struggle has been waged from the foundation of the world. Sir, it has overturned empires. It has crushed thrones. It has beheaded monarchs; and may again do so. It has decimated whole countries and whole empires.

To realize the continuance of this struggle, we have only to cast our eyes back a few years, to the revolutions in Europe, where the vassals were bowed down to the soil by the institution of vassalage; where the owner of the soil bought and sold the people dwelling thereon, and made them absolute slaves. That was borne with for years; but, sir, when that mighty mass, with the energy peculiar to them alone—when oppression became intolerable, and when their burdens could no longer be borne—arose in rebellion, how terrible was their vengeance! Who can forget, sir, the contest of the Teutonic race in Germany and England to throw off that system of vassalage there? Who has forgotten the Celtic race of France and Ireland in those struggles? Who has forgotten the bloody wars of those terrific revolutions? And later still, who has forgotten the revolution of France, when the French nation, rising like a mighty giant from the slumber of ages, hurled their oppressors to the dust, with terrific slaughter and bloodshed? And now, when we look back upon that contest, we are struck with horror. But, sir, it was the heaving of the mighty masses of laborers, and they shook forever that institution of vassalage from off their shoulders.

Again, sir, very recently, when the Hungarians were held in vassalage by their masters, they ventured to rise and assert their right to themselves and to their own labor. They shook the Austrian Empire to its very foundation; and had it not been for the Emperor of Russia, the Hungarians would have forever established their independence and their freedom. This contest is just commencing again in Europe. Nicholas of Russia, finding masses of vassal slaves at his command, is now attempting to crush the spirit of liberty in all Western Europe. The contest predicted by Napoleon Bonaparte is about commencing. That battle which is to make Europe Cossack or Republican is about commencing. England and France have been standing by hesitating and trembling. They have been looking on awe-struck with fear at the struggles about commencing. They pause, deliberate, hesitate, negotiate, and do all they can to avert the struggle.

But the signs of the time indicate that a battle is to be fought—that a terrific revolution, which shall surpass in terror all that has preceded it, is about to commence. I do not believe that Europe is going to be Cossack. I believe that the republican spirit which animates Europe, and which meets with a response from this continent, warm and hearty, will not be "crushed." I believe that the tyrant, about to "crush out" the spirit of liberty, will be compelled to flee back, in disgrace, to his northern haunts of despotism, humbled and degraded; and that liberty and justice will be forever established.

Mr. Chairman, I stated that the principle, which I believed to be that of peace, was the assigning to different portions of this country line and latitude where slavery might go, and where it might not go. I believe that the policy established by our forefathers was correct, and has been productive of peace. While at the North there is no

disposition to meddle with the South, the people of the North will not tolerate, for a moment, any interference with their rights. Had I advocated interference, I should not now be honored with a seat upon this floor.

According to this principle the South has got its share of the bargain. Has the North received its share? Let us look at the matter for a moment. Let us examine this subject a moment. The area of the slave States now admitted comprise 844,088 square miles, while the area of the free States comprise only 631,677 square miles. Thus you will perceive, by this simple statement, that the South has got an area covered by slavery much larger than the North. We have from the slave States ninety representatives, and from the northern, or free States, one hundred and forty-four representatives, thus showing that while the slave States have one fourth more of the area devoted to slavery, we have a larger amount of population in the free States. The whole area of the United States is 3,219,360 square miles. The white population, according to the census of 1850, is 19,553,928. The number of slaves is 3,204,347. Admitting this to be correct, we find that while the number of slaves is small compared with the free laborers, the South have the largest share of the territory now set apart.

Again: In the admission of States into the Union, what do we find? We find that they have admitted, since the organization of the Government, eighteen new States—nine free States, and nine slave States. Here, again, what section of the country has the advantage? Is it the advantage upon the part of the South? Has it, not the largest territory? In the admission of States, have they not had an equal share in the area of the States themselves? What has been the result in regard to the Executive officers of the Government? We find of the fourteen Presidents, eight have come from slave States, and six from free States, while the population at the North is much the greatest.

Thus you will perceive that in every view of the question, no injustice has been done to the South. If any injustice has been done at all, it has been done to the North. If there is any inequality, that inequality is in favor of the South, and against the institutions of freedom and of the North, even if the whole territory of the United States now unoccupied should be forever set apart to freedom and free labor. The South have now their full share of the area of this great country embraced within our boundaries. I have been stated that there is no difference between property in slaves and property of other descriptions. Is this correct? Do not the Constitution of the United States make a difference? Do not the laws of the country make a difference? Has not this difference been universally acknowledged? If there is no difference, why is it that the importation of slaves from Africa is forbidden? If there is no difference between this kind of property and that of horses, what right have we to prohibit the people of the South from going to Africa and bringing away that kind of property?

Again, if there is no difference, what right have we at the North to exclude this kind of property from coming among us? But there is a difference. The difference has always been acknowledged, and is unquestionable. But I object to the extension of slavery over free territory for another reason. I object to it because slavery is an element of discord wherever it is found to exist. I have seen in the public papers that the mechanics of the southern States have, on several occasions, held meetings remonstrating against those holding slave property allowing their slaves to become mechanics, and thus come into competition with free mechanics. This feeling prevails extensively among the mechanics of the southern States, and it is the same feeling that prevails all over the Union.

Sir, I am not here to advocate the rights of the negro, though I warmly sympathize with the oppressed of every race or clime. I am here to advocate the rights of the free laborer, and I do so, conscious that my advocacy of their rights will meet the same response from the free laboring masses of the slave States as from the free laboring masses of the free States. I have long been

associated with that class of people. I have long been associated with laboring men, and every pulsation of my heart throbs in unison with theirs. I know their wants; I know their feelings, and I know their sympathies, and will ever maintain their rights and interests, party or no party.

Another complaint from the slave States has been, that they should have the right to take their property where they pleased. Now, sir, do they possess that right? I think not. It cannot be taken into the free States. It cannot be taken into some of the Territories, although it can be taken into others. But, admitting the position which has been assumed, that this kind of property is the same as any other, have I the right to take my property where it will invade my neighbor's dwelling, and do him injury? Can I build a powder magazine alongside of my neighbor's house? Has any man the right to introduce a manufactory into the midst of a populous city which will poison the atmosphere, and scatter death and disease around him? Can he do these things? Then why not allow this description of property to be carried into all the Territories? Simply from the fact that its going there will be detrimental to the common interest of our country. It would detract from the prosperity of the Territories.

The institution of slavery may be profitable in southern latitudes, where the white man cannot bear the intensity of a tropical sun. Slavery can be taken there and made profitable, but it cannot to any extent in northern climates. Hundreds of free laborers will be prevented from going there to settle if slavery goes there. The result, then, of carrying it into these Territories, will be to obstruct the prosperity of the country; it will be to keep out the free laborers of the North, while it will be of no benefit practically to the South. Now, sir, shall we repeal that act, and allow it to go there?

The great point made by the advocates of this Nebraska bill, and the one upon which they mainly rely, is, that the Territories have a right to govern themselves; that they have a right to do as they please. That assertion appeals to a popular element in the human character; and it is upon that ground, I calculate, that they expect to maintain their position. Now, have the people of the Territories the right to legislate for themselves—to make their own laws? Will gentlemen stand to that proposition? If they will, I will agree to it. But if so, what business have we with this bill? If the people of the Territory have a right to make their own laws, to administer their own affairs, to establish their own institutions, what right have you to come here and legislate for them? The assertion of the principle is directly in opposition to your practice; and I take it that deeds speak louder than words.

The joint owners of these territories have vested the control and government of them in the Congress of the United States. The custom has heretofore been in all cases for Congress to retain the control until some considerable permanent settlement has been made. Territorial governments, heretofore, have not been established until a considerable permanent settlement has been made, when Congress has surrendered a part of the sovereign power vested in them to the people. As the settlements of the people have increased and become more permanent, States have been established, and Congress in these cases has surrendered all control in purely local matters. In the estab-

lishment of territorial and State governments, Congress has acted as States have in giving citizenship. A man removing from one State to another is required to reside a specified time, with a view to a permanent residence, in order to entitle him to the privileges of a citizen; and persons coming from foreign countries, a much longer residence is required before they can enjoy the rights and privileges of citizens.

In new Territories the same principle is made to apply. No one disputes the wisdom of such laws or supposes for a moment, that they destroy man's right to self-government. Government of any kind is a restraint on man's natural liberty; but, if wisely instituted, gives him greater liberty and security than he could enjoy without it.

In the case under consideration, a contract has been made between the representatives of slave and free States, in regard to this Territory, at a time when no inhabitants resided there but the Indians. Persons going there voluntarily, must be subject to this law and contract, and they have no right to complain of it as a restriction of their liberty, or right of self-government.

These Territories are destined to be the homes of millions, I trust, for ages to come. Men will go there from all sections of our country, and make permanent settlements for themselves and their descendants. Numerous and populous States will be formed and settled there. Have the people inhabiting the various States, who paid their money for the purchase of this Territory, no rights or interests involved? Can their rights and interests be justly taken from them? I have full faith in man's capacity for, and right to, self-government. This is the very foundation of my political creed. But can I, in the exercise of my rights, take from and destroy my neighbor's rights? I have a right to do right in all things, but no right to do wrong in anything. The rights of all are predicated in the protection of the rights of each. The States have a deep interest in the proper settlement and prosperity of these Territories, and hence the Constitution has made it the duty of Congress to provide for their wants and take care of their interests.

I find provisions in the bill that the session of their Legislature shall only last forty days, and that only free whites shall vote or hold office in the Territory. What business have we to interfere in this matter? Again, there is a provision that all the laws passed by the Legislature of the Territory proposed to be organized by this bill, must be brought to this House and submitted to our revision. They do not appoint their own Governor or judicial officers. We do not allow them to do any of these things. I might dwell at length on this point, and show the futility of the position assumed; but my time will not permit it.

Sir, it is the duty of Congress to legislate for the Territories. The Constitution imposes that duty upon us. How many persons are there in this Territory, not stationary there, but merely

passing over it? And shall they be permitted to sacrifice the interests of the Territory and of the whole Union? It is the duty of Congress so to legislate for the Territories as to promote the common prosperity of the whole Union.

But I find that my time is about expiring, and I must close my remarks without saying half that I intended to say. You will allow me to say, in conclusion, that I have hope for the future, whatever the action of this House may be. I believe that if the Missouri compromise is repealed, it will open the door to strife and contention, and that whenever Congress is required to admit new States into the Union, whether with or without slavery, there will be conflict and contention. As the matter now stands, on the principles already established, we can be at peace, and free from feuds, and quarrels, and threatenings.

We of the North threaten nothing about disunion. We intend to fight our battles under the Union, and in the Union. The proud stars and stripes shall ever wave over our heads while we battle for our rights. I say that I have hope for the future. I have hope that justice will triumph, and that the intelligence of the American people will do justice to all parts of the American Union—to all the States and all the Territories. I have hope that liberty, justice, and fraternity will be established, and that harmony will eventually prevail throughout the length and breadth of this great Republic; and when that day arrives, we shall realize the prediction of Sacred Writ—"The lion and the lamb shall lie down together, and a little child shall lead them."



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2013

<http://archive.org/details/abrahamlincolnsclic>

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60
61
62
63
64
65
66
67
68
69
70
71
72
73
74
75
76
77
78
79
80
81
82
83
84
85
86
87
88
89
90
91
92
93
94
95
96
97
98
99
100